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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3535
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3397
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4069
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4037
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1223
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001390

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: INDEPENDENCE DAY HOLDS LITTLE JOY
FOR PEOPLE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia Reed Curran. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Independence Day holiday in Turkmenistan lasted from October 26-28 and included concerts, fireworks, and a massive parade. As part of the festivities, government workers were required to attend the events, which seemed to sap the excitement and happiness out of the holiday. Non-government workers for the most part ignored the holiday. The general atmosphere in Ashgabat, now that the holiday is over, seems to be one of relief. Independence Day is one more example of the Turkmen government placing its own interests above those of its people. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) The Independence Day holiday in Turkmenistan, despite all the fanfare in the newspapers and on television, was a celebration intended to honor the government, not a holiday for the people. For two or three weeks, school children, teachers, doctors, and other government employees had been required to attend rehearsals early in the morning in preparation for the Independence Day parade on October 27. The mother of one local embassy employee, a doctor, wondered why they wanted to see her, "an old woman," marching. Another embassy contact who teaches at the music conservatory said that she had to attend practice at eight in the morning in order to learn how to wave the small Turkmen flags she was given.

3. (SBU) The parade itself was a spectacular event, lasting nearly two hours, and involving more than 1,500 military personnel and around 5,000 civilians. There were girls and boys doing traditional Turkmen dances in Turkmen national dress, Ahal-teke horses ridden by men in traditional dress and military uniforms, a variety of military tanks and missiles, floats for national priority projects like Avaza, and thousands of students, doctors, and other government employees waving flags and releasing balloons. President Berdimuhamedov seemed most impressed by the Ahal-teke horses; he broke into a broad smile when one did a series of fancy steps.

13. (SBU) Anyone who was not involved in the Independence Day events, i.e. the non-government workers, either carried on with business as usual, or stayed at home. The government was officially closed Monday-Wednesday, October 26-28 and some stores were not open those days, but many were, and the markets were functioning as usual. A local artist seemed surprised when asked if he was going to stay home from his gallery to celebrate the holiday. "Of course the gallery will be open," he said.

14. (SBU) The mood on the streets gave no indication that there was a holiday. People leaving the show that included dancing, singing, and fireworks at the Olympic Stadium on Monday, October 26 seemed subdued, as if they were leaving work, not a concert. The only display of frivolity that Poloff witnessed was the teenagers who had apparently come from the Olympic Stadium treating themselves to sodas and candy at the Turkish-run shopping center, Yimpas. (NOTE: The teenagers were still wearing their school uniforms, which is why Poloff surmised they had been at an official event. END NOTE.) On October 27, many people were on the street early in the morning, but they probably were going to participate in the parade, not to watch. Two British expats had no trouble finding a spot to watch the parade just around the corner from the Presidential Palace, where the President and officials were watching.

15. (SBU) Now that Independence Day is over, life in Ashgabat seems back to its usual calm pace. Streets that had been closed for repairs and building construction in preparation

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for the holiday are open again, relieving the traffic congestion that had been even worse than usual the week before Independence Day. Government contacts can focus on business other than preparations for the holiday, and schools open again on October 30, after a 10-day midterm break.

16. (C) COMMENT: The lack of excitement, expectation, or happiness surrounding Independence Day in Turkmenistan speaks volumes about the relationship between the government and the people. Independence Day, Turkmen-style, is a day to glorify the government, which of course means glorifying the president, and to celebrate the country's independence, but not the people's. There seems to be a collective sigh of relief that people can now go back to their own lives. END COMMENT.
CURRAN